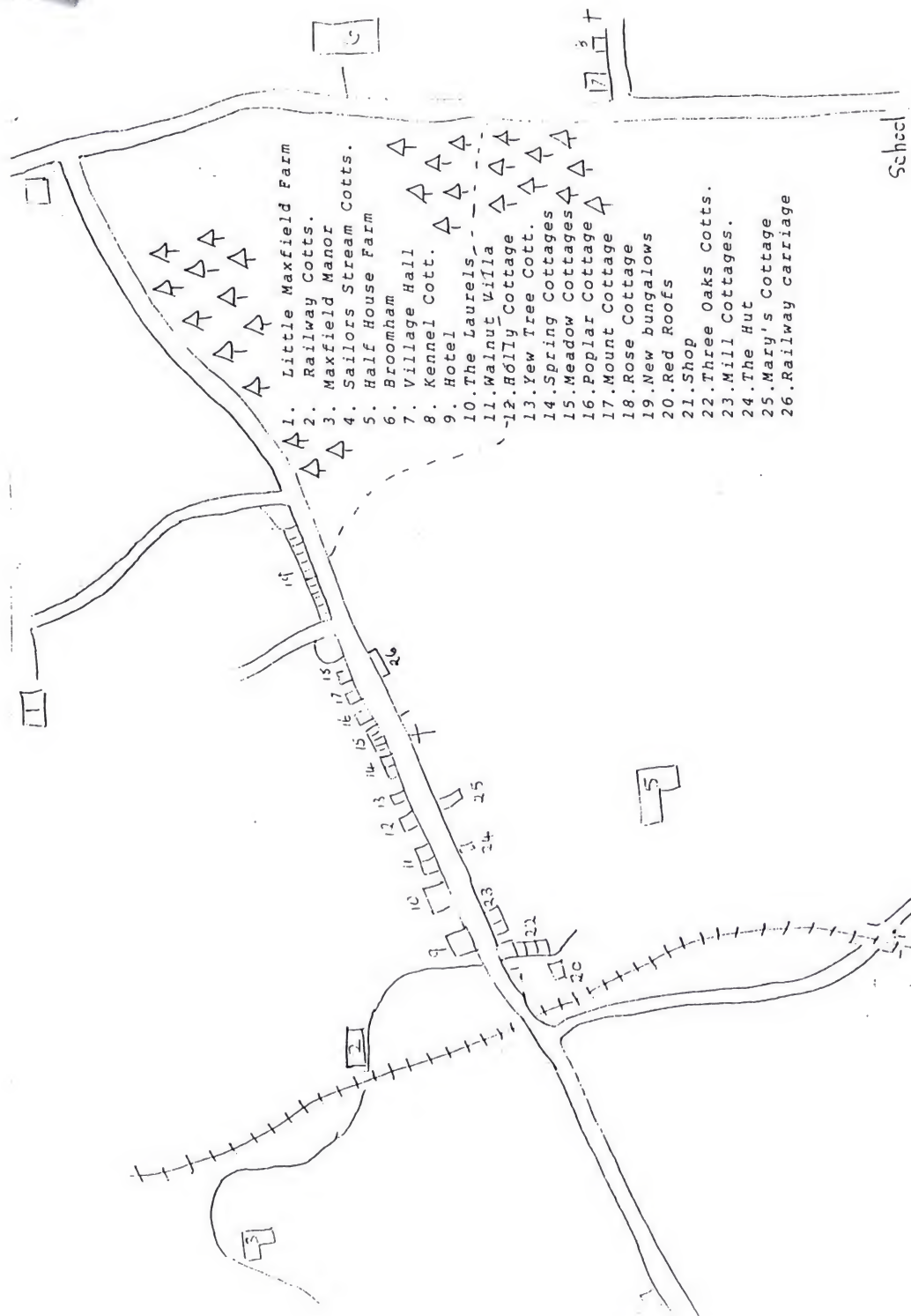


Memories of Three Oaks

by Alice Beeching



Let me introduce you to the village of THREE OAKS as it was then. It was a small hamlet consisting of twenty houses. It is situated to the south west of the A259 road, between the two parishes of Guestling and Icklesham, on the Rye to Hastings main road. The cottages ranged from Rose Cottage to Three Oaks Cottages and the Hotel, which was built in 1888 approximately. the previous drinking place being the Three Oaks Stores, which later became the village shop, under the owner Mr. W. T. Carter, who kept the business going for fifty years, before retiring. The cottagers could buy everything there, groceries, clothing, boots and shoes, brooms and brushes, pots and pans, china and paraffin, which was only sold in daylight hours. Oh yes, must not forget sweets and baccy. Coming from the main road the first building was Rose Cottage, then Mount Cottages, which were two cottages made into one a few years ago. Next was Poplar Cottage, a small wooden cottage with a thatched roof, so named because of the poplar tree in the corner of the garden. Now we come to Meadow Cottages, four in number. I am still living in No. 3 where I was born as well as my brothers and sisters, six in all. My grandparents moved into this cottage in February 1900, the rent being 2s 6d. per week. The two cottages further along the road are Spring Cottages, so named because of the spring which supplied water to the well, where we fetched our drinking water, our own well having been polluted with cesspool water, seeping from the ground from the bungalows built behind the cottages. This all happened in latter years. Spring Cottages are not inhabited now, except by various birds who raise quite a number of broods in the spring and summer. Swallows, starlings, sparrows, bluetits and black-birds to name a few, a lovely home for them. About twenty yards from Spring Cottages was a little three roomed bungalow made of wood with a thatched roof, named Yew Tree Cottage with a very old yew tree beside it. It was generally known as Adam and Eve's honeymoon cottage. After that cottage were six allotments, approximately five rod in each, then we came to Holly Cottage, another one made of wood but not with a thatched roof. To reach the front door you climbed up ten brick steps.

Next is Walnut Villa, a nice brick built cottage. Needless to say there is a walnut tree at the back of it. The next one is The Laurels, which was the home of the landlord, Mr. Thomas Foster, who had the cottages built in the village. The land on which Grey Gables stands now was the landlords vegetable garden. So now we come to the Hotel. The first proprietor that I remember at the hotel was a man of German descent named Mr. Kohler, married, with a son and daughter. Her name was Edie and she was the first woman I ever knew to smoke a cigarette. So we come to the end of the cottages on the right hand side of the road.

On the left hand side of the road, opposite Rose Cottage, is a railway carriage. Aman and his wife lived in this little place, and their first two little boys were born in that carriage. Sad to say that the first little boy was killed in the 1914-18 war. His name is on the memorial plaque in Three Oaks Methodist Chapel, of which he was a member. Having left the railway carriage, we come to the Chapel. Having passed the Chapel, we come to two lovely brick cottages named Mary's Cottages. I have no idea how they got their name. Next we come to the small place known as The Hut, a three roomed building made of corrugated iron, or tin. An elderly woman and her grandson lived there when I was small. Now we have another batch of allotments, and then Mill Cottage, which is so named because of the adjoining building which housed the flour etc. after it was ground from the corn. As far as I know the overhead pulley is still there on which the sacks of corn moved. Perhaps an older native of Three Oaks may know how and when the mill was worked. My first knowledge of the building was as a warehouse, which stored the overflow goods from the shop, also the flour, chicken foods etc. Now we come to Three Oaks Cottages, four in a row, with the Three Oaks shop on the end nearest to the road. A little way past the cottages down a small track is a nice house in its own grounds, named Red Roof, first built for a gentleman associated with the press. And so we come to the end of the village homes.

Going on past the Hotel about 200 yards is the railway Halt. The first trains to run on this line started in 1908, a two carriage train from Hastings to Rye and back again. The fare to Hastings from Three Oaks was 6d. (2½p.) return., half fare for children under the age of fourteen years. It was the S.C. & C.R. South Eastern and Chatham Railway, and the guard on the train counted all of the tickets and children before you could leave the platform. To get the people to ride on the train they gave free rides to Doleham and back again because the old people were scared of that monster. When I was a young child the stage coaches came through the village from Hastings to Rye. The first motor car to come through the village was in 1910 and was owned by the Winchester Doctor, Doctor Skinner.

Our cottages were lighted by candles and oil lamps. Mostly all of the cottages were four rooms, 2 up and 2 down. One stove for cooking and heating - the fuel was mainly wood, plus a little coal if people could afford it. That meant lighting a fire before one could have a cup of tea in the morning. The wood was mainly bought off a wood cutter - faggots for lighting wood and fence poles for logs. Some people bought a few lordens which were cheaper than faggots. The washing facilities were two coppers in a brick building across the back yard, which had fires fed by wood. Washing day was an all day job. It entailed drawing water from wells, chopping wood, for the fires, running backwards and forwards with each lot from the copper to the sink, apart from the journeys to and from the clothes line up the garden. When the washing was finished there was the scullery floor to be scrubbed, the floor where the coppers were, the fireplace to be cleared up ready for the next neighbour, being one copper between two cottages. Likewise one lavatory between two cottages. They were brick built with boxed seats over a large cesspit, very hygienic, with squares of newspapers cut up and hanging on strings on the wall. These buildings were erected approximately fifty yards from the houses and to venture out after dark one carried a lighted candle in a jam jar. Having walked fifty yards with a flickering candle, one invariably found that someone had arrived there first. These little "cubby holes" were shared by ten people. Sometimes on a summer evening you started out for your walk to the privvy to be confronted with three or four people sitting on the garden fence waiting their turn, so

you sat beside them, and when your turn came you forgot what you were waiting for. All these things were part of village life, but to make up for life of the present day there is nothing in comparison. The people were extremely friendly and kind. Nothing was too much trouble to help anyone. Everyone was in the same boat - any trouble in any family and the people were there with any help they could give and they did not want any payment. I am sorry to see all these things disappear with today's attitudes of I'm all right Jack, never mind you. I'm afraid I cannot keep up with the rat race.

Having given a little insight to the way of living, it might be as well to note that most of the cottages were brick floors, covered with coconut matting. Perhaps a little peep into one or two families. The family in one cottage of three rooms, housed mother and six children. Father was away in the 1914 - 18 war. Sad to say he is amongst the numbers who never came back. Another cottage housed a retired naval man, most interesting to listen to his tales of the sea, a dear old man. He used to go into Hastings once in three months to collect his navy pension and used to bring back fish for people from the fish markets, lovely fresh herrings, eight for 1s. (5p.) . That was a feast day.

The children from the village went to Guestling School as did others from Coghurst, Doleham, Snailham, Guestling Thorn, Friars Hill, White Hart and Batchelors Bump - all in the parish of Guestling. The numbers varied from 108 to 120. There were three class rooms, infants, juniors and seniors with approximately 35 to 40 children in each class. The Head master was Mr. H.G. Bescob who lived in the school house, which was in the centre of the class rooms. It was a lovely house with large spacious windows. The senior class room was on the right side of the house. The infant and junior class rooms were on the left of the house. The junior mistress cycled to school each day from Ore where she lived with her parents. She died on January 22nd 1984 in her nineties. The infant teacher lived in a cottage on White Hart Hill, just above the shop. Mr. Bescoby taught the senior class.

We started school at the age of four years and left school at the age of fourteen years. We walked across three fields, through a wood and then along a stretch of road, about two miles in all. We carried sandwiches and a bottle of cold tea for the day and then had our dinner about 5 p.m. (a little touch of gentry - late dinners). We used to have quite a lot of snow in the winter and it used to drift into the gateways and the big boys used to lift the small children over the drifts. We were never allowed to stay away from school except through illness. It was quite a paraphernalia getting ready for school, especially on a wet day. First there were black button boots to put on with about eight buttons to be done up with a button hook, next came a pair of galoshes over the boots (waterproof protection). next came a pair of gaiters buttoned up the side of the legs - so much for feet and legs. Now came hat and coat. On top of the coat was a very wide scarf put on round the neck, crossed over in the front and carried round to the back and pinned with a large safety pin. On top of that lot a water proof mac and bonnet was put, your dinner bag being underneath the raingear. Last of all your muff, for your hands to go into. I never remember having gloves. We wore white starched pinafores over our dresses, on to which was pinned our handkerchief if we had no pockets in our dress. Having got our wardrobe on our backs we set off. We left home about 8.10 a.m. to arrive at school at 9 a.m. then the infant teacher would begin to unrobe us. Our school holidays were as follows - one week at Easter and Whitsun, two weeks at Christmas and six weeks in summer, which was taken from the end of August to cover the hop picking period. One half day on Ash Wednesday and Ascension Day, following a service in the Church. Mr. Bescoby played the organ and Mr. E.H. Wynne the Rector, took the service. Mr. Wynne visited the school on Tuesday and Friday mornings to take the scripture lesson. Empire Day was another special day that we loved. We marched out of school and formed large circles around the flag pole on which the Union Jack was flying and we sang the traditional British songs Land of Hope and Glory, Rule Britannia, Yeomen of England and many others, each child waving a Union Jack. It is sad to see those sort of traditions fade away. It would

surprise me today, if any child at school now would know when Empire Day is, or whose birthday it was. Those are a few details of our school days.

Now we come to Sundays. We attended Sunday school at 10.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m. and with luck the 6.30 evening service, if we were not sent to bed early for some reason. I have been to the evening service sometimes when the Chapel was full and extra chairs have been put down the centre aisle. Where have all the nice times gone? One or two things come to my mind, which may be of interest. Having explained where our shopping was done at Mr. Carter's shop, I have remembered how we obtained our bread and flour. Our bread was delivered to the landlady three times a week and we collected it from her, the payment being made with the rent, which was paid on Mondays. Lovely crusty coburg loaves, or cottage loaves (a little crusty dome on top of a large crusty bottom, for 4d. a loaf (I'm afraid I do not know how much this is in decimal currency. The flour was delivered in sacks to the landlady, but was kept in the warehouse, adjoining Mill Cottage after the mill stopped working. It was delivered by Mr. Jenner in an old fashioned covered wagon, the corn having been ground into flour by Mr. Jenner's windmill working on our way to Ore when shopping, which was mainly for chemistry or ladies clothing. We had to walk to Ore. The other thing which comes to mind is the decorating of the cottages, the ones with brick walls, which was the two downstairs rooms, known as kitchen and scullery. The kitchen was papered with wallpaper at 1d. per roll, and the scullery was whitewashed with whitening powder at 1d. a pound. The landlord supplied the materials and the tenants did the work.

If you leave the village and go down the road over the railway bridge down the hill straight ahead the hill is known as Sailor's Stream Hill. At the bottom stands two wooden cottages with thatched roofs, named Sailor's Stream Cottages. The road was fairly narrow with high banks and overhanging trees. This hill was used a lot in winter by the village children with their sledges and toboggans - as good as the hills in Switzerland. There being no traffic in those days children could play in the road.

On the opposite side of the road - now known as Eightacre Lane -

facing the lower gate of the railway halt was a sandstone quarry. I have a photo of my grandfather working there, hewing out stone. The size of the quarry was from the top hedge of the garden of Elim bearing round to the hedge of Lensland and up the road hedge making quite a nice sized quarry. When all of the sandstone was quarried out it was filled in again with earth etc. and was then planted with larch trees which made a very pretty spinney. My Grandfather took part in all these activities. Another little matter which might be of interest to people now living down the hill from the halt where Hillcrest Stores now stands is that in my young days that was one big field belonging to the Coghurst estate, and it always seemed to be planted with swede turnips, or mangold wurzel, which the women from, the cottages used to work at, pulling them and putting them into lumps, covering them with leaves until the horse and carts could gather them in. These jobs of work were mostly done in November.

Before I write any more incidents of village life, I must pop into Mr. Carter's shop for a few items. 1 lb. sugar, which was weighed out of a drawer under the counter. It was shovelled into a blue bag made of paper, like blotting paper - a rather long upright bag. It was then bounced up and down on the counter to settle the grains of sugar, then one side was tucked in, then the other side of the bag making two points on top, which was then tied down with a piece of twine string. the shovel and the weights and scales were made of shining brass, beautifully clean. have 2 oz. or 4 oz. of butter, according to how much we can afford this week. The butter is cut off a large lump on a marble slab, is nicely patted up with pretty marked butter patters, making a nice decorative pat of butter. It was a rare treat to have a piece of bread and butter, margarine being the fat that we could afford. It is no wonder that now we will not eat marg. Now, ½ lb. rice - same procedure as the sugar, ½ lb. broken biscuits, which were sold out of 7 lb. tins, put into paper bags, easy to get at, not packeted like today, where they need hammer and chisel to open them. We can now have ½d. worth of sweets if there is any change left. That meant 1 oz. sweets, which were

then put into a cone shaped bag, made out of blue squares of blotting paper type. The paper was wound round the hand, tucked in at the bottom and then the top tucked over and in. Now we run home as quickly as we can if it is a hot summer day because of the butter getting melted. It is quickly retrieved, put into a pail and lowered down into the well in the cool. Those were the refrigerators in our young days. The buckets on the wells were usually heavy studded horse buckets, permanently on the chain or rope, so our smaller pail of fat rested in the larger bucket. We did not have to worry about keeping milk because it was delivered twice daily from a can, directly after milking. Now we will come back through the village up to the top of the slope to Rose Cottage again, which we have been told by the landlord was built in the mid 1700s as a farmhouse. There are still foundations of the outhouses under the top soil - the long room from front to back on the left hand side of the house, as you face it from the road, was the dairy. Later on it was turned into a drinking place, but it was not licensed, so you had to drink outside. As we come along the road, we come to Morgay Wood Estate, which was one large wood extending to the now Corporation ground at the entrance to Fourteen Acre Lane. The Corporation ground was a large pond. After the 1914 - 1918 War the wood was sold to a builder at Battle, by the name of A.G. Mitchell. In due course a very large board was erected at the entrance to the wood which read STOP FLIRTING AND SETTLE DOWN _ BUNGALOWS £295. Then wood cutters moved in and soon the beautiful trees laid in ruins. Work soon began on the four roomed asbestos bungalows, twelve were built on the road side of the wood, and three going back into the wood on the side of the road recently made up. By 1924-1925 the wood was cut down and the people of the village were allowed to help themselves to the wood to clear it away - and so the bungalows started to spring up. Sometimes three or four would be worked on, according to how far each man had done his part towards it, tilers, carpenters, plumbers, painters etc. As work was progressing the last bungalow in the wood became occupied by MR. Mitchell and his family to save travelling to and from Battle each day. Still a lot of work to be done on the bungalow when tragedy struck the family (which consisted of one boy aged 5 years 11 months, and one little boy of 1 year old). Laddie had come home from school one day and was

playing outside with his football when it fell into the cesspool - the lid not being securely placed. Laddie reached over to get it, but lost his balance and fell in. When no response was made after calling Laddie to come in to tea, news flashed around the village. that Laddie Mitchell was missing. People turned out searching for the boy. He was found drowned in the cesspool about 6.30 p.m. The date was March 11th 1925. On the following Sunday prayers were said for the family at the Sunday School, but none of the children could sing hymns. The occasion was too sad. Needless to say Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell moved right away from the district. A long time after Mr. Mitchell came back to take an evening service. at the Chapel - he was a preacher. Buildings sprang up in fields and any odd places all through the 20s, 30s. and 40s. and so the spacious fields and woods where we used to play vanished. It might be of interest to know how the roads were made up in the early days before tarmac came about. There were huge lumps of very large stone very neatly put on lay-bys along the roadside, which was then broken up fairly small and neatly placed by men who wore eyeshields and leather shields on their hands. Next the steam roller came into operation. The stones were spread on top of the road, the steam roller rolled them in for a bit, and then a water cart would go over it and make it thoroughly wet and then the roller would continue its job until it was nice and smooth, the water being drawn from ponds of which there were many more about than there are today.

There were carts of gypsies. The women folk used to come round to the cottages selling clothes pegs which the men had made. Real pegs which lasted for years, made from wood (not plastic which break when you look at them). The pegs were 3d. a dozen large ones and 2d. per dozen small ones. We used to walk to Lidham Farm (now Mrs. Hemmings farm) and collect skimmed milk for 1d. a quart, then we had a lovely time watching the gypsies cooking on their wood fires. To get into Hastings we walked up Rock Lane, into Ore and caught a 1d. tram ride into the town. The old fashioned trams which ran on rails and had a pole on top which went along wires which made sparks at junctions. The drivers could drive from

either end of the tram. They did not turn round. The East Kent bus service first started from Rye to Hastings in 1921. The gas was brought into the village in 1932, electricity followed shortly after in 1932 - '33, and mains water was laid on in the summer of 1960. In my collection of old photographs I have one taken of Meadow Cottages in 1904. There are two men walking down the road dressed alike - caps, waistcoats and trousers with their nicky tams on (not in fashion these days). The two men were friends, one was Thomas Foster - the landlord - and the other man was my Grandfather John Beeching. They were great friends until they both died in 1916. John Beeching in March and Thomas Foster in July. They are both buried in Guestling Churchyard under the big oak tree - side by side, which enables them to still have a chat if they wish. Mrs. Foster carried on being our landlady until her death in 1928. Her daughter, Mrs. Hetty White then became the new landlady. Things were very much the same as in her mother's time - the only difference being that Mrs. White collected the rents on Monday mornings - coming round herself to get the money. Just to re-cap here, the rent for this cottage was 2s/6d. per week from 1900 to 1916, then my mother became the new tenant after her father's death - that meant the rent was raised to 3s. per week. When Mrs. White became landlady she increased the rents by ¼d. <farthing> a week, so they were then 3/-¼d. Now that became a bit of a problem for Mrs. White when a tenant laid 3/-¼d. on the table because she had to tip all of her money on to the table to sort through to find a ¼d. (farthing) change. Mum would say to take it off next week's rent, but Mrs. White would say, "No no, Mrs. Furminger, I must have everything straight because we never know what might happen before next Monday. Needless to say her handbag was the size of a school satchell. Having got the money right, she would then have a little chat, Mrs. White saying she had just called to see Mrs. so and so, and she did look ill, poor old sold. I say "poor old sold" perhaps Mrs. White did not know it was soul and not sold. During the latter years of Mrs. Foster's life both she and her daughter (Mrs. White) attended the Methodist Chapel for the

evening service and Mrs. Foster could not whisper, and we as kids were very amused when everything was quiet to hear a deep voice boom out "I say Hetty, is that Mr. So and so?" and Hetty saying "Shush Mother, everyone can hear you". Silence reigned for a little while, until the old lady thought of something else. After Mrs. White's death the tenants were given the offer of buying their cottages, most of them did buy them. A newcomer to the village may wonder why there are no buildings on the left hand side of the road, where there are a lot of fields and plenty of space on which to build. That is because up to the late 1970s it was private land, under the Ashburnham Estate and building was not allowed, but it has now all been sold off to private people. When we were children at school, the squire, Air Anchital Ashburnham lived in the stately home of Broomham, His father before him also lived in Broomham and they had a family of seven children, 5 boys and 2 girls. The two daughters were often seen in the village. Miss Maud, a tall stately lady, sometimes rode a bicycle (incidentally I have a lovely poem written by Miss Maud. about the men who had gone to the 1914 - 18 War from Guestling. Miss Bride, her sister, was not quite so tall. I don't remember seeing her on a bicycle, perhaps she did not ride one. Another nice thing which has vanished was when the ladies were met walking along the roads, the little boys touched their caps to them. Nothing much ;in that you might say but it seemed a very nice gesture. It must have made them grow into nicer men with more respect for ladies. Surrounding Broomham was a beautiful park with lovely beach drives. I know of three entrances on to the road. There was one entrance known as the Orange Gates which I think was just before you get to the Village Hall. When my Mother and her sisters were at Guestling School, Lady Ashburnham used to ask the children if they would pick bunches of primroses on Good Fridays and deliver them to her on the Saturday for decorating the Church for Easter Sunday. When they delivered the primroses on the Saturday afternoon, they were given 1d. (one penny) for each small bunch and 2d. (twopence) for each large bunch, also a bun and a glass of lemonade - a luxury for village kids. so they were taught at an early age to earn their living. There was no such thing as pocket money. The only coppers that I ever had were for running an errand for anyone. One great thing comes from living in that way, one never craves for things they haven't got that other people have.

As you enter Church Lane there is a white cottage named Kennel Cottage, so named because the kennels of the East Sussex Foxhounds were there and when we used to go to school the hounds would be howling or barking. Whether they wanted their breakfast or wanted to go out chasing foxes I don't know and I am not sure if Sir Anchitel Ashburnham was the Master of the Hounds but he was always at the meets surrounded by horses and hounds.

Three Oaks has an old farm house in a field behind the Chapel named Half House Farm, but we are not sure in which century it was built. It is typical of the type of another ancient farm house which was built in the 17th century at Little Maxfield Farm, just a short way from the village. If you travel down the lane on the left side of the Hotel, you will come to the railway crossing with two lovely brick cottages named Railway Cottages. Cross over the railway and walk across a couple of fields and you will come to Great Maxfield Manor, which was once used for the overflow of Monks from Battle Abbey. It was the home of Lord Douglas until recently.

Another item of the Sundays in the early years might be of interest. The village people were early risers, the main reason being to get a good fire going to get the cooking on, which mostly was a meat pudding made with 4d. of pieces of beef and a piece of butcher's suet, which had to be chopped up fine on a meat board, then the dough was made for the crust and put into a cloth, fitted into a colander, meat and seasoning put in, top crust on and then tied up with string. This was then put into an iron boiler of boiling water. The boiler was as large as two saucepans of approx. 9" in diameter, then the various kinds of vegetables were put in with the pudding, in string bags, mesh about a quarter of an inch, according to the length of time each vegetable needed, four to five varieties in season. Usually following this first course was a fruit pie and custard. All fruit and veg. were grown in the garden - no such thing as dieting in those days, The men having worked from six o'clock in the morning to six in the evening for six days a week were glad

of a day of rest, and nice leisure time to enjoy their dinner with a lovely sleep to follow before Chapel in the evening. No half days off work until the late 30s.

This is not a history book of Three Oaks, but just a few recollections of my early life in this village, which might interest some people. Hoping that whoever reads this will be able to appreciate village life of yore.

signed A. M. BEECHING

FOOTNOTE These were 'jottings' written during prolonged and painful illness. Alice died in July 1985.

This account has been reproduced by kind permission of Alice's brother, the late Ron Furminger